

3rd International Conference of the International Childhood and Youth Research Network Call for Papers - Theory and Method in Child and Youth Research

Theme: Theoretical and methodological topics of interest to child and youth research

Title: Considering issues of power, vulnerability, validity and reliability of research when involving children and young people as research participants

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ABSTRACT: Research with children is viewed often as, potentially, different from research with adults, mainly, because of adult perceptions of children and children's position in adult society, or because children are viewed to be different. Those that argue adapted research techniques with children, also emphasize the competence of children. There however lies also a potential controversy and a question on why, if children are indeed competent social actors, there is a need to use 'child-friendly' methods to communicate with them. This paper presents current debates on the topic, and a key argument that research with children is influenced by the way in which researchers perceive the status of children; this then influences the choice of methods. Views on whether or not children are indistinguishable from adults, or whether or not adults can be full participants of children's worlds, will be presented and discussed alongside ethics and power differentials. The impact of such views as well as other issues on methodological choices will be also discussed. These other issues may include assumptions about childhood; extent to which research with children is valid and reliable, use of language and researcher's interpretation; vulnerability; selection of research settings. Advantages and disadvantages of using a variety of adapted methods (e.g. visual methods) to involve children in research are also discussed. In relation to power and equality in the research process, this paper discusses sources of power and to what extent these are direct (i.e. between individuals) or "indirect" (result of socially constructed power).

Key words:

Voice; participation; ethics; inter-generational relations; child and youth-led research